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February 28, 2018

The White House
Office of the President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I recently read the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) report: "*Administrative Investigation, VA Secretary and Delegation Travel to Europe.*" This report concludes that VA Secretary, Dr. David J. Shulkin, intentionally misled government ethics officials and then lied to investigators to cover up the abuse of taxpayer's funds and government resources. Therefore, I write to ask you to relieve Secretary Shulkin of his current duties. I also request that you nominate as his replacement a true outsider to the VA's bureaucracy.

I am particularly concerned that, according to the OIG's report, the Secretary inappropriately accepted complimentary tickets to a Wimbledon tennis match from a Ms. Victoria Gosling. Then the Secretary knowingly mischaracterized Ms. Gosling as a friend of his wife (Dr. Bari) to ethics officials. The report indicates that he did so specifically to mislead the investigators into believing that these tickets qualified for the "personal friendship" exception to the rule prohibiting the acceptance of gifts. The OIG, however, found no evidence to document the existence of such friendship. In fact, upon sharing the additional information with the investigating ethics official, the OIG report states that Ms. Kennedy, the lead investigator on the examination, "concluded the 'totality of the documents totally indicate that they're not friends, as represented in Secretary Shulkin's response...'"

Then, when Dr. Shulkin was offered the opportunity to produce any documents to support his characterization of the relationship with Ms. Gosling as a personal friendship, the OIG report states that the Secretary "produced no evidence that his wife and Ms. Gosling communicated with one another outside of official events." This failed attempt to mischaracterize a relationship to gain an exception from ethics rules shows the Secretary's lack of respect for the guiding principles that ensure an ethical VA, cabinet, and government. In all, this VA OIG report clearly indicates that Dr. Shulkin violated the trust that you, the American people, and most importantly our veterans place in the individual responsible for Veterans Affairs.

Additionally, it appears that the Secretary did not follow his own guidance regarding official VA travel. On June 29, 2017, just two weeks before the Secretary's trip to Europe, Dr. Shulkin sent a memo to all VA employees demanding that all VA travel be "essential," as a cost-saving mechanism. According to the OIG report, the Secretary's eleven-day trip consisted of three and a half days of meetings, including an evening reception. Further, the report states that the schedule

in Europe “included significant personal time for sightseeing and other unofficial activities.” Based on the OIG’s evidence and report, it is clear that Dr. Shulkin and his wife prioritized sightseeing at the expense of our nation’s taxpayers. Similarly concerning, is the Secretary’s failure to follow his own June 29th memo requiring that travel requests should “clearly document and retain the rationale for their decisions in the event travel requests are subsequently called into question.” As a result, the OIG could not “determine whether the value of the trip to the VA, including the value provided by each participant in the trip, was consistent with the Secretary’s memorandum.” The OIG also determined that “inadequate documentation makes it impossible for the OIG to determine precisely which costs, if any, should have been borne by the traveler rather than the government.” Although the OIG was able to calculate that the trip “cost the VA at least \$122,334.00,” we may never know the true cost of the Secretary’s personal tourism to the taxpayers. This is unacceptable.

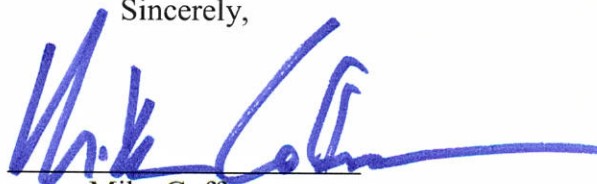
Finally, the OIG report concludes that the Secretary directed the misuse of VA resources. Specifically, that, “Secretary Shulkin directed VA Program Specialist Gough to work with Dr. Bari to plan personal activities for the Secretary and Dr. Bari during the trip.” The report continues, “Mr. Gough was serving as a *de facto* personal travel concierge to the Secretary and his wife by providing detailed tourist planning and travel research services on official time at Secretary Shulkin’s direction.” Even more troubling, the OIG report indicates Secretary Shulkin failed to recognize the inappropriate nature of his request to Mr. Gough. Secretary Shulkin’s use of Mr. Gough’s official time in this manner is entirely inappropriate. I agree with the OIG’s findings, “This was time that should have been spent conducting official VA business and not providing personal travel concierge services to Secretary Shulkin and his wife.”

Based upon the facts provided in this OIG report, I believe that Secretary Shulkin clearly lacks the moral authority to lead the VA and the integrity expected of a member of your cabinet. When the leader of a department is seen as willing to violate or stretch the rules to personal advantage, the example set is unacceptable. Inevitably, employees throughout the VA will consider the example set by Secretary Shulkin as a “green light” to avoid accountability, to take opportunities for personal enrichment, or other violations of laws, regulations, and their duties.

Mr. President, you promised the American people that you would end the culture of corruption and bureaucratic incompetence that for far too long has defined the leadership of the VA. Unfortunately, Secretary Shulkin, by his conduct, lacks the moral authority to achieve your goals of a transparent, accountable VA that is dedicated to meeting our nation’s obligations to the men and women who wore the uniform and made tremendous sacrifices in defense of our freedoms.

Thank you and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mike Coffman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mike Coffman
Member of Congress